COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Manzanar Relocation Center

Manzanar, California

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An entirely new way of life, that of instituting and participating in a newly-created community of ethnically homogeneous individuals, was forced upon an unsuspecting segment of the population of the United States when because of pressing demands, the orderly evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast became a reality. That segment of the population was unsuspecting in that it did not fully realize until a very late moment that the Federal Government would actually prescribe the evacuation. It paid scant attention to the rabble-rousing local newspapers. It cogitated and cast aside arguments that evacuation was needed as a precautionary wartime defense measure and as a protective device for the safety of the Japanese[1] themselves. Thus, in March, 1942, when a Presidential Proclamation was issued setting up Military Defense Areas and Civilian Exclusion Orders, many of the affected populace were caught off-guard and were dumbfounded by the turn of events. However, the unpleasant task of moving to Relocation Centers was accomplished without undue physical hardships. Much cooperation was in evidence on the part of both the administrative officials of the Wartime Civilian Control Administration (WCCA) and the evacuees, and soon approximately 110,000 Japanese were housed in Centers in

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1. For the purposes of brevity and to avoid painful repetitions, the term "Japanese" will be used to indicate all persons of Japanese ancestry, both citizens and non-citizens of the United States, except when subdivisions of the group (i.e., Issei, Nisei, and Kibei, which will be defined within this paper) are used for differentiation and clarity.

California, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and Arkansas. Manzanar Relocation Center, near Death Valley, California, which had a peak population approaching 10,000, was the first Center to be established on a semi-permanent basis; it lasted four years.

The government agency first to handle the ticklish and non-precedented problem was the WCCA mentioned above. Within a short period of time a more stable organization, the War Relocation Authority (WRA), was established under the supervision of the Department of the Interior. Recruitment for personnel was conducted under Civil Service Commission regulations; therefore, many qualified persons were scattered throughout the various Centers. There were numerous transfers from the Indian Service. The men and women attracted to positions offered by the WRA were trained and/or were interested in such fields as psychology, sociology, public administration, education, recreation, medicine, finance, social anthropology, and social welfare. Hence, it is easy to see that there was no dearth of persons to supply ideas and plans for community organization. Top officials met in Washington D.C. to formulate and issue general policy statements which they then distributed to each of the Centers from time to time. Thus, all Centers were operated in more or less uniform fashion except in the case of the few phases in which a measure of discretionary powers was allowed.

In Manzanar families were housed in single-storied barracks, three to four families to each. Fourteen barracks in addition to two latrine-shower barracks, a mess hall, a laundry barrack (filled with wash tubs), and a bare recreation hall comprised one block. In all, there were thirty-six such blocks consecutively numbered as well as one hospital area. The Resident (or evacuee) population

was composed of three fairly distinct groups. First, there was the group of Japanese born in Japan (automatically ineligible to United States citizenship) who came to America at about the turn of the century and in the early 1900's. They are known as the Issei. Secondly, there was the group of young people born to the Issei in the United States. These natural born American citizens are known as Nisei. Thirdly, there was a group of Nisei sent to Japan at an early age to study. Many of this group, the Nise-Kibei, or Kibei, spoke Japanese much more fluently than English and had more sympathies with Japan and Japanese customs than did their brother Nisei.

All aspects of community organization were undertaken with the understanding of the existing conditions of living described above and with the realization that the population was divided into the three categories often in conflict one with the other. Often, the Issei, Nisei, and Kibei were treated as one homogeneous group with the same or similar interests and standards of quality and performance. This inevitably led to discord, but mainly through the method of trial and error such conflicts were ameliorated.

The structural pattern of the community is easily described because of the simplicity. Manzanar was situated in desert country near Death Valley in the shadow of Mt. Williamson, one of the peaks of the Sierra Nevadas. Nearby, the Owen River, the source of water for Los Angeles, flowed, but it was outside Center limits and only a few of the Residents were able to see it. The street pattern was of the grid-iron system. Oddly enough, the streets were named alphabetically and so entered on official blueprints, but the names did not gain wide usage and references were made to specific streets by

their location with respect to various Blocks. The buildings were monotonous repetitions of single-storied, black, tar-paper covered, rudely constructed barracks. Firebreaks between groups of four Blocks served as grounds for outdoor sports. Thus, even this physically planned community failed to take into consideration necesarry space allocation for play or recreation areas. However, it was fortunate that firebreaks were large enough to afford room for baseball diamonds and football fields.

During the early days of Center life community organization was merely in the blueprint stage. Trained personnel and needed materials were largely lacking. There was a Community Services Division, but little or no community services. There was an Education Department, but no head of department, or facilities or faculties for teaching. Since all the events took place in 1942, it was indeed surprising and a bit discouraging to note how slowly everything (except the evacuation) progressed. Children were taken out of schools in mid-semester, but no facilities were provided for them to round out their semester or to make up their grades. A voluntary system of tutoring of grade and high school students by college young people developed through intensive work of a few Nisei. This system was finally recognized by the state of California and the achievement marks issued by the non-accredited tutoring staff of volunteers were accepted by the California school districts. In this case a few member of the community saw a great need disregarded by the "higher authorities" and acted spontaneously to meet that need. Four months later the Administration organized and staffed an Education Department complete with a Superintendent of Education, a

High School Principal, an Elementary School Principal, a Primary and Nursery Schools Supervisor, and a teaching faculty.

There being no physical provisions for schools, one block of residents in one section of the Center was shifted to other blocks, and the barracks left behind were used for highschool classes. Elementary school classes were scattered throughout the Center. When classes began, there was a shortage of teachers and an extreme paucity of equipment--no seats or desks, no blackboards, few textbooks, etc. However, students attended classes, sitting on linoleum-covered floors, because there was not much else to do.

The library arrangement was orginally instituted under the direction and supervision of the Recreation Department for two reasons: 1. Books first appeared in quantity in the numerous cartons of donated matter for recreation; 2. There was no organized Education Department or, for that matter, any department equipped to deal with the situation. Books were piled in helter-skelter fashion, uncatalogued and unshelved. Finally a Nisei who was a graduate student in library administration took over the task of creating a library. She did a remarkable job, and by the time an Education Department was finally in operation, the library was a going and successful activity. Later, the Education Department incorporated the Library into its own system.

Recreation and recreational needs were not overlooked to the same extent as was true for education. Space allocations were not in evidence except for the bare recreation barracks (as cited above), and major reliance was placed upon donations for sporting goods (viz., footballs, basketballs, pingpong sets, baseballs and bats,

toys, et.); however, the administrative officials early recognized and gave some direction to recreational needs. A "Recreation Office" was established early in Center history for the lending of materials received from interested private groups and organizations such as the Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., American Friends Service Committee, Catholic and Protestant Churches, and certain public schools.

The community demand for recreational facilities was especially strong because there was no way of engaging in leisure time activities at a time when almost all of each day was unoccupied. This was during the period when there were few jobs and very little work to be done because of the fact that the newly organized community was just beginning to take shape. At this time the main chores were (1) working in mess-halls, (2) disposing of sewage and garbage, and (3) clearing of land. The Head of the Department of Recreation together with a few of the Nisei who had some background in physical education work quickly created an organization to serve the existing needs of most of the young adults. It was too difficult to plan and execute a program for children and for the Issei, so that part was shelved for later perusal. As time went on many types of recreational activities were presented. They included baseball, football, volleyball, pingpong, weightlifting, gymnastics (rings, horizontal bar, parallels, and sidehorse), judo or jiu jitsu, go (a Japanese game said to be similar to but more complex than chess), bridge and pinocle tournaments, woodcarving, flowermaking, dress designing, music, concerts, and dancing. In fact, almost all participation and spectator recreational activities found in a normal

community were eventually organized.

The religious needs of the community were met by the ministers and priests of Catholic, Protestant and Buddhist Churches. The Maryknoll Catholic Church of Los Angeles sent a Father and a few Brothers and Sisters to organize religious services. They remained in the Center on a full-time basis. The Protestant Churches sent visiting pastors who entered the Center each Sunday to deliver sermons and meet with the Residents. Also, a few of the Residents in the Center who were pastors previous to the evacuation conducted services which, incidentally, were held in both the English and Japanese languages. The Buddhist Priests officiated over their ceremonies almost entirely in the Japanese language. At the young people's meetings simple Japanese, interspersed with a few English words to help over the rough spots, was used. The churches and temples occupied five or six of the recreation halls mentioned above. It may be of interest to note that because of the scarcity of recreational outlets during the early few months, many Residents attended church, joined choirs, and enrolled in Bible classes out of sheer boredom. Of course, as recreational facilities increased these church-goers found other things to do to occupy their time.

The political interests of the members of the community are described in my paper, "Government of the People for the People."[1]

It becomes rather obvious that one of the major tasks of the War Relocation Authority was to find some sort of industry to occupy the time which hung so heavily upon the hands of many of the

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1. See end of this paper for copy.

Issei who had been conditioned throughout the years to long and arduous labor. Eventually, the majority of the male Issei found work in mess-halls, in work crews engaged in sage-brush clearance duties, and in the many custodial positions. The female Issei found work in mess-halls, in custodial positions, and in the garment factory which made articles of clothing exclusively for Center use. The Nisei, both male and female, found work in the camouflage net making project which lasted about a year, in the garment factory, and in various clerical positions. They also acted as instructors and assistant instructors in the school system. Here, for the first time, many capable Nisei were able to use and exploit their own talents and training which they had been unable to exercise formerly because of the lack of opportunities.

Three or four months after the Center was organized, and when the Residents began to become acquainted with one another, the administrative officials encouraged the formation of a cooperative. After much discussion and arguments a Center-wide election showed that a preponderant majority of the Residents was in accord with the proposal; consequently, the Cooperative Enterprises of Manzanar was founded upon accepted cooperative principles. Both the Issei and the Nisei worked together to make a success of the undertaking. As needs for the Residents arose the Cooperative Enterprises, through its Board of Directors, tried to meet them to everyone's satisfaction. Thus, in the beginning two small retail outlet stores (or "canteens" were established. One sold foodstuffs while the other sold drygoods. Later, a barber shop, a beauty shop, and a shoe repair shop were also begun. The Center newspaper, "The

Manzanar Free Press" was also incorporated under the spreading "twin pines" of the cooperative. Each enterprise provided work for the Residents and at the same time provided needed services not supplied by the W.R.A. Audits were made, rebates were distributed, and open meetings were held; everyone over the age of eighteen, Issei and Nisei alike, had a voice in the affairs, and more important, each had a sense of responsibility as well as a definite feeling of participation in community doings.

The policing function was performed by a squad of husky bi-lingual Nisei who made up the Internal Security Patrol. They were unarmed, but they possessed badges, uniforms, and the resulting stamp of authority. They were merely guardians of the peace within the Center and no major function other than that appeared to be theirs. A detachment of armed Military Police, U.S. Army, was quartered just outside Center limits to quell any disturbances and to maintain order at all times.

The foregoing description of a few phases of community life and organization indicates that whenever the needs of the community were not met satisfactorily, if at all, some member of that community undertook to remedy the situation. Then, when the administrative staff coincided activity with blueprints and plans, these self-initiated programs were included in the final organization. This crude picture of conditions omitted many details, ramifications of actions taken, and many problems, some of which were more easily solved than others. However, it does portray a segment of community organizations as it existed in one Relocation Center during the time of inception and after about a year's existence. It serves to demonstrate the beginning and the extremely rapid growth of an atypical boom town.